

Cambodian troops on parade in Kambol.



AP/Wide World Photos (Ou Neary)

Peacetime Engagement

A Role for Military Advisors?

By PAUL MARKS

The Armed Forces are increasingly being called upon to intervene in complex emergencies. The requirements for personnel, resources, and readiness, in particular in military operations other than war, demand a more proactive approach to threat reduction. Necessity will drive earlier and smarter interventions aimed at accomplishing the same long-term goals as current involvements but with fewer assets and less commitment. This article argues that it is time to reconsider a tool rarely used in peacetime military engagement, the full-time

military advisor. It proposes advisory efforts for two nations in the Pacific region. Early preventive intervention in such states could efficiently accomplish long-term security objectives.

National military strategy refers to early intervention as *shaping the environment*, but thus far this approach has not proven very successful. From drugs to terrorism to nuclear proliferation, the world is becoming more dangerous. Yet the role of military advisors in providing host country militaries with the means to combat such threats commands little attention. The legacy of Vietnam, coupled with concern over force protection, makes many civilian officials and senior officers wary of sending advisors in harm's way.

As a result, the United States is missing out on opportunities to help unstable nations not be-

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come failed states. Sri Lanka and Cambodia are cases in point. Both are democratic countries with societies which exhibit varying degrees of pluralism. Governmental institutions in Sri Lanka are older and have greater stability and legitimacy. The concept of a professional military operating under civilian control is more firmly established. By contrast, democracy only recently arrived in Cambodia via U.N.-sponsored elections in 1993. Cambodian society suffered a setback in 1997 when one of its co-prime ministers forced the other from office by employing one military fac-

bombings which led the United States and Britain to categorize it as a terrorist organization. This group has engaged in international acts of terrorism, including the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the Indian southern state of Tamil Nadu in May 1991. Recent Indian press reports claim that combined training and coordination is being conducted between LTTE and insurgents in northeastern India. Tamil Tigers operate ocean-going vessels that are capable of reaching Thailand and Cambodia to purchase weapons and ammunition on the black market and mounting interdiction operations against the Sri Lankan navy. They fund their movement through contributions gathered from Tamils living abroad and by exporting drugs and arms. For instance, Canadian officials told the press in 1996 that LTTE was raising up to \$1 million a month through criminal activities in that country, including the sale of heroin and guns.

Thus LTTE presents a threefold transnational threat. First, it could spread terrorism to both the United States and Western Europe. Second, it can continue to engage in smuggling drugs and weapons abroad. Third, it can destabilize India not only through the insurgent connection but by transferring operations from Sri Lanka to Tamil Nadu, the home of 55 million Tamils.

Cambodia: In Search of a Stable Future

After thirty years of conflict, Cambodia has less of a security problem than Sri Lanka.² The genocidal Khmer Rouge is no longer in power. And there are other promising signs. Politically, the Kingdom of Cambodia took its place as the tenth and last member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1999. Domestically, it formed a coalition government which is now in its second year. The Department of State recognized the 1998 elections as a peaceful and orderly process which was free from intimidation. More than 90 percent of those eligible voted, and 60 percent chose a party other than the ruling Cambodian People's Party.

However, Cambodia is not without challenges. While democracy is taking hold, respect for human rights is poor and the rule of law barely exists. Security forces, including both the military and the police, are not professional organizations. They engage in illegal activities with impunity, and over a hundred unresolved extrajudicial killings date to factional fighting in 1997.

As previously mentioned, weapons and ammunition from Cambodia have found their way to insurgents in Sri Lanka, including SA-7 antiaircraft missiles. The problem is serious enough that in 1999 the foreign minister of Sri Lanka went to Cambodia and Thailand seeking cooperation to halt this transnational threat. Other insurgent

Tamil Tigers operate ocean-going vessels that are capable of mounting interdiction operations

tion against another. An election in 1998 put the country back on a democratic track. Although it is uncertain that Prime Minister Hun Sen will step down if defeated at the polls, the potential for real democracy exists. Both countries face problems, but when considered together they illustrate the need for early intervention to deal with transnational threats under diverse circumstances.

Sri Lanka: A Nation at War

Sri Lanka, a country of 18 million people, is beset by a bloody insurgency.¹ The Sinhalese are its dominant ethnic group. Buddhists make up 75 percent of the population, including most of the Sinhalese, but feel threatened by the larger Tamil population of southern India. In Sri Lanka the Tamils, who are mostly Hindus, form 13 percent of the population. The conflict originally involved various groups advocating a Tamil homeland (*Tamil Eelam*), but that movement today is being carried out by just one group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which has been fighting since the early 1980s. Once avowedly Marxist, LTTE now downplays ideology. It seeks an independent socialist state. The government has responded with legislation and structures that allow limited local autonomy but it has been unwilling to go farther. Any effort to establish a *de facto* partition of the country would bring swift electoral retribution against the party in power, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who narrowly won reelection some three days after she lost an eye in an LTTE assassination attempt in December 1999.

The present conflict follows a typical pattern of insurgency, with some events dominated by conventional operations and others by guerrilla warfare. LTTE regularly uses terror and suicide

Observing Vietnamese training, 1964.



economies and enjoy healthy trade relations with the United States. And they are legitimate authorities within their respective borders. In accord with U.S. national security objectives—promoting democracy, market economies, human rights, and the reduction of transnational threats—they are candidates for aggressive engagement programs that would help them contain internal problems before they escalate. Traditional engagement activities, including short-term training teams, unit exchanges, and individual training in the United States, have been insufficient against the transnational threats discussed above. Full-time military advisors to help the armed forces of these countries solve their internal problems would be more effective. Diplomatic initiatives to obtain agreement and active participation by the host nations must occur first, but it is unlikely that either country would refuse American assistance toward helping themselves.

Neither Sri Lanka nor Cambodia need military advisors on the same level as South Vietnam in the 1960s. A small number of foreign area officers, Special Forces officers, noncommissioned officers, and functional specialists, serving on permanent change of station assignments under the auspices of a security assistance office, would suffice. Measures of effectiveness tied to goals are critical and are identified below. The key to defeating specific transnational threats is addressing the broader issues of professionalism, force structure, strategy, and operations that combined will not only enable host nations to neutralize threats but make their militaries politically neutral institutions. In the case of Cambodia, enabling its armed forces to contribute to national reconstruction will also help build the economy of one of the poorest countries in the world.

Supporting Sri Lanka

The response to LTTE is led by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF), which are not equal to the task. They are dominated by the army, which has grown from an overall strength of 6,000 and five infantry battalions in 1983 to 120,000 with nine infantry divisions (eighty combat battalions), a navy, and a jet-equipped air force. Rapid expansion without concomitant training has had disastrous consequences.

Strategic direction from the political authorities has never been adequate, although tentative steps began in 1994–95 to develop a national plan. This absence of strategy is matched by a lack of success. SLAF has often lost the initiative, failed

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groups buy arms on the Cambodian black market. In late 1999 Thai security forces reported intercepting two SA-7s and ammunition which originated in Cambodia bound for the United Wa State Army, the dominant Burmese narco-trafficking group in the Golden Triangle.

In addition to the trade in arms Cambodia is a leading producer of marijuana, with a porous coast used to transship heroin and other drugs from the Golden Triangle. The United States lists the country as a significant drug supplier and Vietnam has reported a steady increase in attempts to smuggle marijuana, heroin, and especially methamphetamines in from Cambodia.

Such threats, emanating from an emerging democracy, as well as the moral imperative of restoring civil society in a country where international negligence allowed genocide to run rampant, justify early action. And, given the unpatrolled Cambodian coastline that serves as a transshipment site for both drugs and guns, LTTE may be a main player in both threats.

Peacetime Engagement

Unlike many states with internal problems that pose a threat to the United States, Sri Lanka and Cambodia are functioning democracies. Even though the rule of law has not fully taken hold in Cambodia as it has in Sri Lanka, there is cause for optimism. Moreover, both have market

Sri Lankan soldiers after rebel bomb attack.



AP/Wide World Photos (Gemunu Amarasinghe)

to exploit achievements, spread itself too thin, and made operational blunders. It lacks the ability to formulate and execute joint and combined planning and operations. But it has not as yet developed a theater approach to integrating assets. The mobility to generate combat formations or sustain operations is absent. Commanders do not sufficiently coordinate tactical and operational fires. While they have close air support, including Russian Mi-24 Hind helicopters and Israeli Kfir aircraft, they do not have forward air controllers. In addition, stovepiped intelligence reporting does not benefit tactical commanders. Both tactical and operational logistics are poor, with transportation assets too centralized to be responsive. Two small special forces brigades have deteriorated from successful unconventional warfare units into Ranger-type light infantry that conducts an inordinate number of conventional operations. One sign of progress is that SLAF is skilled at civil-military operations and integrating civilian authorities into interagency efforts.

SLAF has weaknesses in doctrine, training, and force development. While a staff college was recently established, the majority of officers have one year or less of formal training. Foreign training is primarily done in India with a small number of officers going to Pakistan, Bangladesh, Britain, and the United States. There are branch

schools, but in-unit training is the norm. Because of the rapid growth of the army, few officers have any expertise in planning and coordinating large operations. There is no intelligence school. Operational demands necessitated by war have made training and education a second priority.

Overall, SLAF is a professional military—human rights violations, common in the 1980s, are declining—but after 18 years its tactical and operational successes have come to naught because of the lack of an overarching strategic concept to bring the conflict to a close.

U.S. military advisors in Sri Lanka should focus on preparation of strategy, operational planning, and assistance in functional skills augmented by instruction by Special Operations Forces on specific tactical skills such as air assault, naval infiltration, and counternaval infiltration.

There is also a need for doctrine development that ties functional skills into a battle-focused training system. The goal would be defeat of LTTE in three years and the withdrawal of advisors within five. Measures of effectiveness could include:

- adopting a national security and military strategy within six months
- developing a combined plan with India to prevent use of Tamil Nadu as a rebel base

Figure 1. Proposed Advisory Responsibilities in Sri Lanka

The seven military personnel required for this effort include:

- O5/O6—advises joint staff on national security strategy, national military strategy, operational planning, and theater geometry
- O4/O5—advises joint staff on operational planning
- O4/O5—advises joint staff on intelligence collection, dissemination, and training, and on establishing intelligence school
- O4/O5—advises on operational logistics and reorganization of logistics systems
- O4/O5—advises air force for training and coordination of close air support
- O4/O5—advises navy on coastal patrolling and interdiction operations
- O3/O4 or senior noncommissioned officer—advises training and doctrine command on establishment of joint unit training center.

- reorganizing the chain of command and theater geometry within six months
- establishing a training center for infantry battalions and combined arms teams in a year
- organizing intelligence courses for all personnel serving in intelligence positions
- improving operational level tasks (intelligence, logistics, and fires) within 18 months
- introducing effective combined interdiction operations with the Indian navy in two years
- denying the insurgents of resupply by sea within a year.

These objectives could be accomplished with a relatively modest advisory force (see figure 1).

Cambodian Security Challenges

The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) is an amalgam of 100,000 personnel drawn from four former protagonists: the State of Cambodia

(Kampuchea) army which was formed by Vietnam during its occupation from 1979 to 1989, the Khmer Rouge which surrendered and was integrated into the national army

between 1996 and 1999, republican forces which fought the State of Cambodia between 1979 and 1989; and royalist units which also opposed the government. The most powerful are former State of Cambodia officers who remain politicized. Many are members of the ruling party, some generals are on the party's central committee, and a number of officers are loyal to the prime minister rather than to the constitution or the king.

Annual funding for RCAF is only \$214 million, 35 percent of the modest national budget. Operationally, the service chiefs report to a commander in chief, currently an army officer, who

reports to the minister of defense. In addition to the army, navy, and air force, there is a French-trained and equipped national police force or gendarmerie. It is part of the ministry of defense but performs civil duties. It has been implicated in drug running and illegal taxation (literally resorting to highway robbery).

The salary of Cambodian privates is \$18 and 22.5 kilograms of rice per month. Typically soldiers receive the rice, but the pay may be three months late. A general officer officially receives \$40 per month, but special allowances vary from \$500 to \$1,000. Most officers run businesses to survive. New lieutenants come from a small military academy. There is also a barely functioning noncommissioned officers academy. A staff college runs a mandatory three-month course for all field grade officers. Branches conduct basic training for both enlisted personnel and officers. All administration for the force of 100,000 is done by pencil and paper. There are fewer than a dozen computers in the military and no facsimile machine. A dozen officers train in France each year and a smaller number in Indonesia, Malaysia, and more recently China. The United States suspended training for RCAF in July 1997. The HIV rate in the armed forces is between 4 and 8 percent.

U.S. military advisors in Cambodia should focus on developing professionalism, training, downsizing, fostering civil-military relations, and building a naval force capable of countering drug and arms trafficking. Because of existing conditions, this would require commitment and patience. While engineer, medical, and naval advisors might be withdrawn after five years, most advisors would stay in place for up to twenty as a new generation of officers is trained. The short-term goal is reducing transnational threats, and the long-term goal is professionalizing the armed forces.

Effectiveness could be measured as follows:

- achieving professionalization and depoliticization by officers no longer belonging to political parties, serving in the national assembly, or serving on the central committee of political parties
- improving human rights and rule of law by prosecuting human rights violators within the military and fully cooperating with civil authorities
- organizing a three-tiered professional military education system with an armed forces staff college course, command and general staff college, and branch schools for junior officers with the maximum use of exchange assignments to military schools in other ASEAN countries (especially Thailand)

U.S. military advisors in Cambodia should focus on developing professionalism

Figure 2. Proposed Advisory Responsibilities in Cambodia

The ten military personnel required for this effort include:

- O5/O6—advises joint staff on national security strategy, national military strategy, defense organization, and professionalization; also teaches at armed forces staff college and command and general staff college
- O4/O5—advises joint staff and training bureau on organization and theater engagement activities; also teaches at armed forces staff college and command and general staff college
- O4/O5—serves as senior advisor to joint staff on organization, demobilization, downsizing, budget reform, pay system reform, and automation
- O3, warrant officer, or noncommissioned officer—advises on reorganization, demobilization, downsizing, budget reform, pay system reform, and automation
- O3/O4, warrant officer, or noncommissioned officer—advises engineer command on civil engineering, road building, and demining
- O3/O4—advises health command on medical training with emphasis on basic medical skills and preventive medicine
- O4/O5—serves as senior advisor to navy on coastal patrolling, drug interdiction, and environmental protection
- O3/O4 or petty officer—advises navy on inland waterway patrolling
- O3/O4 or noncommissioned officer—advises deputy chief of general staff for civil affairs on reintegrating former Khmer Rouge units; plays critical role in integrating military civic action with non-governmental organization activities and information operations; augmented by active and Reserve component temporary civil affairs personnel.
- O3/O4—serves as legal advisor to judge advocate general on drafting a code of military justice and getting code passed into law, reforming military court system, and training military lawyers; also teaches human rights, law of land warfare, and military law classes at armed forces staff college and command and general staff college.

- demobilizing the armed forces to a manageable end strength of no more than 50,000 (with savings going to fund other reforms)
- reforming administration through automation together with increasing military pay and depositing the salaries of soldiers on time through direct deposits to bank accounts
- improving health care for soldiers with simple preventive medicine (mosquito nets, hand-washing, and condoms)
- introducing naval policing of illegal fishing and interdicting drug and arms traffickers
- dedicating engineer command to horizontal construction and demining with priority on building and rehabilitating secondary roads to connect remote and poor areas which traditionally are bases for insurgents.

A possible advisory force that could assist with these goals is shown in figure 2.

Employing full-time military advisors will require adjustments in the conduct of preemptive engagement. Even though CINCs can deploy advisors using operations and maintenance funds, the preferred approach is security assistance or foreign military financing grant credits earmarked by Congress. Credits would fund countries like Sri Lanka and Cambodia that cannot afford the cost. Today, the major recipients of credits are Israel, Egypt, and countries in Eastern Europe. As transnational threats increase and preemptive action becomes necessary this allocation will change.

Within the interagency process, it is vital that the objectives of military advisory efforts are detailed in theater engagement plans developed by CINCs and mission performance plans prepared by U.S. embassies. The language used in these plans should be identical, with the same objectives incorporated into both types of plans and detailed right down to individual advisory positions.

The stigma of military advisory efforts is unwarranted when compared with their potential benefit. The fear of involvement in another Vietnam led Congress to outlaw advisors in Cambodia in 1970. But future threats are not declining in either complexity or number. Such efforts offer a cost-effective, efficient mechanism for defeating threats before they call for contingency operations. Countries such as Cambodia and Sri Lanka may manage their problems indefinitely; but while the survival of these states may not be threatened, the danger to other countries, including the United States, is growing.

An effective preventive engagement program for countries at risk would go a long way in minimizing the danger from transnational threats and contributing to democratization.

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NOTES

¹ Information on Sri Lanka comes from open sources and interviews with Michael Poore, former U.S. defense attaché to Sri Lanka; Mahesh Senanayake, former commander of the Sri Lanka 3^d Special Forces Regiment; and Thomas Marks, a Sri Lanka specialist and author of *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam* (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1996).

² Information on Cambodia is drawn from open sources and the author's experiences as CINCPAC defense programs officer in that country from 1996 to 1999 as well as temporary duty as a U.N. military observer in 1993.